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From: "Ohr Somayach <ohr@jer1.co.il>" [Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair]
Highlights of the Torah weekly portion Date: 10/29/95 1:52pm
Subject: **Torah Weekly Lech Lecha**

"Go for yourself..." (12:1). There was a traveler who was journeying from place to place. He came upon a large mansion ablaze with light. He said, "Don't tell me that this mansion has no master!" Suddenly, the owner peeked out and said to him "I am the master of the mansion..." Similarly, because Avraham Avinu looked at the world and said, "Don't tell me that this world has no Master," the Holy One, Blessed be He, 'peeked out' and said to him. "I am the Master of the world..." (Midrash Rabah)

"And Hashem said to Avram 'Go for yourself...'" (12:1). The great tzadik, Reb Zushia of Anipoli once said "When I get to the next world, the World of Truth, if they say to me: 'Zushia why weren't you like the Baal Shem Tov?' That's not going to frighten me one bit how can you compare me to the Baal Shem Tov?! And if they say to me 'Zushia why weren't you like the Magid of Mezrich? That's not going to frighten me either Look at me and look at the Magid of Mezrich! What frightens me is when they say to say to me 'Zushia! Why weren't you Zushia!?' Zushia that you could have been, why weren't you even that...?" "Go for yourself" can also be translated "Go to yourself..." The mystical sources understand this to mean: "Go to the root of your neshama (soul)." In the next world, there will be no claims against a person that he failed to live up to the potential of others. However, it is our duty to maximize our talents, to push out to the very limits of our abilities so that we bring the root of our neshamos to flower. It is only in this way that we will be, at least, our own "Zushias." (Adapted from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin)

"So Avram said to Lot: 'Please let there not be strife between me and you...Please separate from me'" (13:5). A person should always distance

himself from partnerships, for they are the source of arguments and lashon hara. Avraham and Lot did not start out fighting it was their shepherds who fell out, and inevitably this led to Avraham asking Lot to separate from him!

"And (Hashem) took him outside and said to him 'Look up, please, at the Heavens and count the stars, if you can count them' and He said to him 'So, too, will be your descendants'" (14:24). Two great rabbis of the previous generation, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky, were once seen standing beside the chauffeur driven car which was to take them home, discussing which of them was going to get out of the car first. As Reb Moshe lived nearer, and would thus get out first, he got in the back and Reb Yaakov got in the front. The reason for their discussion was that if Reb Moshe had sat in the front, when he exited, the driver would look like a chauffeur and they were concerned for the dignity of the driver. The Baal Shem Tov explains that the descendants of Avraham are like stars. >From our point of view the stars seem like insignificant specks of light, whereas in the heavens they are in reality whole universes. When you look at another person, realize that he is a star not the Hollywood variety! but a galactic mirror, reflecting the infinite light of the Creator. He may seem very small to you. He may not have achieved much in your eyes. But his potential is vaster than the trackless emptiness of space. When you see people in this light, you will behave towards them with great respect, and when you show others respect, they gain respect for themselves, and this in turn can give them the encouragement to fulfill their potential greatness and shine all the more brightly. (Adapted from Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, Mayana Shel Torah, and a story by Rabbi Nisson Wolpin in The Jewish Observer)

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 40:27 41:16

"...As much dust as Avraham used, turned into swords..." (41:2).

Nachum Ish Gamzu was a man who's very name expressed his essence whatever happened to him he would always say "This is also for the good!" He never doubted that what Hashem does is always for the best. Nachum was chosen to travel to the Emperor and present him with a box filled with precious stones as tribute to the Jewish People. On the way, and unknown to Nachum, the jewels were switched with worthless dust. With great ceremony the 'jewels' were presented to the Emperor and slowly the box was opened in front of him... The Emperor's rage knew no bounds at this unbelievable insult from the Jews. Suddenly, the prophet Eliyahu appeared in the guise of one of the Emperor's ministers and said: "Your Imperial Majesty, this must be the special dust that the Jews' forefather Abraham used to defeat the four kings as it says '...As much dust as Avraham used, turned into swords...'. Let us, at least, try the dust and see if it works for us as well."

The Emperor agreed and Hashem caused a miracle to happen the dust indeed proved to be lethal against the Emperor's enemies. We must remember that even in the darkest moments of exile, when all our jewels look like dust, Hashem will eventually bring the prophet Eliyahu to announce the dawn of redemption. (Based on the Midrash)

From: "jr@sco.COM" "mj ravtorah@shamash.org"

Date: 10/25/96

Shiur HaRav Soloveichik on Parshas Lech Lecha

[The Rav began the shiur by saying that he heard from his father that without the methodology of studying Talmud that was introduced by his grandfather Reb Chaim, it would be impossible today to study Halacha with students who are trained scientifically. The method of Reb Chaim is a most modern method that involves classification, conceptualization and definition, particularly to look for unity in Halacha. The problems need to be formulated an understood. The question and the answer are of secondary importance. This was also the method that Reb Akiva Eiger's children ascribed to him as well. The Rav noted that he was a forerunner of Reb Chaim. When it comes to the study of Tanach there was no Reb Chaim. We don't tend to look enough between the lines and get hold of the larger picture. The Ramban was unique in his ability to see and understand ideas in Chumash. His spiritual perceptions are exceptionally fine and sensitive to every word of chumash.

The Ramban contributed greatly to the philosophy of religion because he was original in his thoughts and approach to religion.]

Vayomer Hashem el Avraham Lech Lecha Mayartzecha etc. According to the Ramban Sefer Breishis is called Sefer Hayetzira. It deals with creation of the world and each being and the life events of the patriarchs, continuing through the death of Joseph. It is not limited to the simple topics of reaction of the world and man. What happened to them will be paradigmatic and symbolic of what will happen to their children through the ages. According to the Ramban we don't look at the events that occurred to the patriarchs from hindsight as being symbolic, rather they foretell the events that will happen to the Bnay Yisrael. There is pre determination of what will happen to Bnay Yisrael. The Ramban lays down this concept saying that the reason that the description of the travels and well digging etc. are described at great length because each event forecasts an event that will occur to Bnay Yisrael. The sensational thing in the Ramban is that we may derive from an event a similar event that that will transpire in the lives of the children. Any event that happened to the patriarchs and is recorded and translated will never be invalidated and will have to occur at some later point in the lives of Bnay Yisrael. For example, the destruction of the 2 Batei Mikdash are foretold by the 2 wells that Yitzchak dug and were filled in by Plishtim. The experiences of the patriarchs determined the future course of history.

Rashi and the Chachmei Sefard raised the problem that Artzecha Umimoladetecha Umibais Avicha means Ur Kasdim and not Charan (the Ramban disagrees). Abraham left Ur Kasdim long before he received the commandment of Lech Lecha. Rashi rearranges the order of the verse of Lech Lecha. Even though Avraham already left Ur Kasdim his native land and ancestral home established in Charan, he was told to go even further away from his fathers home that was newly established in Charan. According to Rashi, Terach left Ur Kasdim voluntarily. Avraham's further migration came later.

Ibn Ezra disagrees with Rashi and rearranges the verse (Ain Mukdam Umeuchar Batorah). According to him the command to leave Ur Kasdim was given to Avraham before he left Ur Kasdim. The opening verses of Lech Lecha should be conceptually inserted before the verse of Vayikach Terach Es Avraham at the end of Parshas Noach. The next Parsha would begin with Avraham leaving Charan and going to Canaan. The Ramban rejected this approach. He raised the question on the Ibn Ezra that the Torah describes Terach as the central figure in the migration from Ur Kasdim to Charan, not Avraham. Terach's decision to leave was spontaneous and apparently Avraham left with him out of obedience and not because of a divine commandment.

If we would accept the opinion of the Ibn Ezra we would find the answer to another puzzling question. Chazal stated that Terach repented and embraced the new faith of his son, a Gd that he could not see or touch. This is an interesting statement because the Navi Yehoshua describes Terach and his father Nachor as idolators. Rashi quotes this on the verse Vatah Tavo El Avosecha Bsayva Tova. Why would Hashem promise to unite him with father who is an idolator? From here we learn that Terach did Teshuva. When did Terach make this change in his life to embrace the Elokay Avraham?

We need to look at this conversion in the context of his relationship with his son Avraham. Terach was the one who sought to destroy his son physically after the episode of the destruction of the idols. Terach informed the king of Avraham's outrageous actions knowing full well that it would lead to a death sentence for his son. In general, tension between father and son results in deep enmity usually on the part of the son towards the father. When the hatred is on the part of the father toward the son it is indicative of a mental aberration bordering on the psychopathic. It indicates a sick soul that delights in destructive behavior. Chazal wanted to emphasize that Terach was sick with hatred towards his son. He was willing to sacrifice his family and everything he stood for and sacrifice his son. When did Terach change his behavior?

It happened when Terach decided to abandon Ur Kasdim and move his

family to Charan. It was a strange decision, one that is most perplexing to understand when looked at through the background of the Midrash. Terach is described as being one of the leading citizens of Ur Kasdim, some even state that he was related to the royal household. It was a difficult move for Terach to uproot himself from the advanced society that existed in Ur Kasdim and move to a primitive place like Charan. Ur Kasdim society was the most developed society in antiquity, industrially, scientifically. Its society was quite sophisticated and modern for its time. His migration was counter to normal human nature in migrating to a less sophisticated society. He was the father of the of the idolatrous society in Ur Kasdim. What caused him to abandon all this? The answer is Hirhur Teshuva. The thought that perhaps his son Avraham was correct and that his philosophy was wrong. The Baal Teshuva was responsible for the decision to leave Ur Kasdim and begin life anew in Charan.

Hashem waited for this moment to arrive for Terach to be willing to make this extreme sacrifice and undergo the tribulations that the immigrant must endure. When he made this decision, Hashem told Avraham to leave.

We don't know if Terach knew of Avraham's contacts with Hashem. The Rav noted that the Torah does not [usually] engage in physical descriptions of people. In Tanach we do find them (e.g. David). Typically these descriptions are not relevant to the unfolding events of the covenantal community and the realization of the great vision foreshadowed by the patriarchs. For example, by the Akeidah the Torah is interested only in the event. It does not mention whether Avraham knew the way to the mountain or if he inquired as to directions from anyone. There is only one subject matter: Avraham's compliance with the divine order to sacrifice Yitzchak. In the story of Jacob sending Joseph to search for his brothers, the Torah describes in detail the encounter and conversation between Joseph and a man, who Chazal say was the angel Gavriel. At first glance this narrative appears to be inconsistent with the usual style of the Torah. Why tell us all this? Because Joseph's mission was not planned by Jacob. Chazal say that at first glance Jacob should not have sent Joseph to look for his brothers. He knew very well the enmity of the brothers towards Joseph. Hashem forced him to send him, because the edict of Ger Yihey Zaracha needed to be fulfilled. We don't know if Terach knew of the secret that Hashem commanded Avraham to migrate to Canaan. We do know that when the message came through for Avraham to leave. Avraham found to his great surprise that his fathers bags had been long ago packed ready to leave on the great march to Canaan.

The Rav said that the objection of the Ramban to the opinion of the Ibn Ezra as to Terach being the central figure in the migration to Canaan is no longer critical. That Avraham complied with the word of Hashem is well known. One only needs to look at the Akeidah to see the depths of commitment of Avraham to Hashem. The greatest story in Parshas Noach is not the departure of Avraham from Ur Kasdim but is the Teshuva of Terach and his abandonment of all he knew and loved to follow the Gd of his son Avraham. The greatest story of the Baal Teshuva is contained in the verse of Vayikach Terach. The Torah tells us all this in a few words. But the verse is not so much concerned with the journey they took, but rather the dramatic change that occurred in Terach.

Avraham was not always successful in his attempts to convert his own family to his faith. He did not succeed with his brothers, nephews, he had limited success with his nephew Lot. The word Lecha means that Avraham and Sarah alone should go to Canaan, no other family members should come along. Lot tagged along. Once Lot decided to remain at Avraham's side, Avraham had to teach him and train him, even though he did not want him to come along. In order to be a great teacher one must be able to reach his own family. Teaching begins at home. In order for Avraham to be considered the Av Hamon Goyim he had to be able to show success within his family. Terach was his success story. Avraham saw Terach was ready to leave so he did not say anything regarding his own desire to leave. He was respectful of his father and kept in the background to give the impression that it was Terach alone who initiated the decision to leave Ur Kasdim. He knew that

Terach, the Baal Teshuva, had attained a very high level and did not want to diminish the the great achievement and sacrifice that Terach decided to make.

There is a verse in Job, *Mi Yiten Mitamay Tahor Halo Echad*. Who can make the Tamay to yield Tahor. The Midrash says that this is Avraham from Terach. Avraham was a great prophet but he achieved his covenant with Hashem and prophecy after great searching. Moshe on the other hand was surprised with the gift of prophecy and imposed with it by Hashem. Avraham asked many questions and sought Hashem. As the Rambam describes, Avraham in his youth was immersed with the people of the generation yet he was constantly questioning their practices looking for the truth. He had the mind of a genius. He had vision and asked questions. There was depth to his intuition, there was breadth to his understanding. Otherwise Hashem would not have chosen him as the *Av Hamon Goyim*. Such traits are hereditary. Terach Passed these traits on to him. Terach wasted his talents for a long time. Avraham utilized his talents.

The Rav quoted the Rashi on *El Haaretz Asher Arekah*: Hashem did not reveal to him the identity of the land in order to increase his love for the land and to reward him for each statement. A similar approach is used when describing the commands of going to the Akeidah. Hashem did not give Avraham any directions to travel. How did he know where to go? Avraham traveled from place to place, finally arriving in Canaan. When he arrived he did not know immediately that this will be his land. Only later did Hashem tell him that this will be his homeland. The Ramban, like Rashi, said that Avraham did not receive directions. But how did he know where to go? Should he go north, south, east or west? Similar to the Akeidah how did he know which mountain to travel to?

Avraham used the term *Hisu Osi Elokim*, when Hashem caused Avraham to be lost and bewildered, confused as to direction to go. The Ramban says that he wandered like a stray sheep not knowing how to return home. Hashem did not guide Avraham. He wanted to bewilder and mystify him, to move on till he found the land intuitively, till he magically felt the attraction of the land, the way birds are mechanically to migrate in fall and spring. We don't understand this pull, it is mechanical. Hashem wanted Avraham to develop the ability to distinguish between *Kodesh* and *Chol*, and to be guided on his own intuition into the land of Canaan.

The verse states that Hashem chose Avraham and took him out of *Ur Kasdim* and changed his name to Avraham. even though he wandered around as a lost sheep for a long time, He felt intuitively that his destination was Canaan. He toured Canaan and spent time there even before being told by Hashem that he had arrived in the right land and it would be given to his children as their homeland.

The Ramban adds that Avraham guessed where to go based on his intuition because he had no premises on which to base his directions. But Terach also left to go to *Eretz Canaan*, the Ramban mentions that Avraham had *Daas Aviv*. Terach also headed to Canaan. The Ramban points out that not only was Avraham blessed with uncanny intuition, but so was Terach.

He also felt a mysterious pull on those that were thirsting for the knowledge of Hashem. Why was Canaan intuitively selected by both Terach and Avraham? What attracted them to this land? Here is a central idea of Judaism. The idea of *Kedusha* pulled them both to Canaan. Major decisions in one life are sudden and intuitive. Secondary decisions are based on careful calculation. Avraham and Terach made a major intuitive decision.

People respond to a stimulus. The *Dor Hamabul* responded to the challenge of beauty. Their philosophy was that one must succumb to the power of beauty and give in to the aesthetic challenge. They responded to the fair women who were the symbol of beauty. Modern man is still captive to the aesthetic experience, the exploitation of enjoyment in life, making use of all that is available. The serpent in the garden of Eden was the first one to describe this aesthetic pull when describing the *Eitz Hadaas* as *Nechmad L'aynayim*. The aesthetic experience is boundless: you want to grab as much as possible. It has no laws that restrict man. The ethical life involves restraints. I can not take what ever I wish whenever I want it. This is directly

opposed to the aesthetic experience which says no limits. I resent authority and tradition. There is one moment only, the fleeting present. The Rav compared western society with the *Dor Hamabul*. Such aphildophy results in the disintegration of society.

The *Dor Haflaga* thought that power was the great challenge to man, that he be able to set himself up as god. Technological achievement, according to the *Dor Haflaga*, was viewed as the end to be worshiped, it makes him proud to be a man. The ability to control their environment was the greatest goal. The Rav compared Communist society with the *Dor Haflaga*. Living for the present with no eye on the past and future causes breakdown of society. However, the *Dor Haflaga* was a highly organized society that prized technological achievement above all else. They would weep for a dropped brick that they spent years carrying, yet did not shed a tear for a baby that would fall from the tower. The technological achievement is more important than the human being, along the goal to attaining conquest and infinity. Man wants to be triumphant, he wants to be a hero. He hates to be defeated.

Avraham proclaimed a new idea to the world: *Kedusha*. The main goal is not to gain the maximum pleasure but to find Hashem and cling to him. To do this man does not need to always be successful. Man can afford to be defeated, as Avraham was throughout his years of wandering. As long as he is pulled in the right direction he achieves and is successful. *Kedusha* is frightening to those who are afraid to fail and those who lack imagination. Those that have imagination and are bold are pulled to *Kedusha* instinctively, mechanically.

David describes his quest for Hashem as that of the gazelle searching for the brook. Why did he use the metaphor of the gazelle? It would have been obvious to simply describe it in terms of human attraction to Hashem? If one observes the nature of animals in their mechanical drive that pushes them to find water, they persevere until they find it and are able to drink. David wanted to describe man in the same way as needing that mechanical instinctive push to Hashem. If man tries to deny this urge he breaks down. This drive is to be found in every person no matter if he is an atheist or an agnostic. He still has this drive to *Kedusha* like the gazelle to water. Avraham and Terach were driven mechanically and were not satisfied until they found Hashem.

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Dvar Torah: *Lech Lecha*, 5757 1996

Rabbi Moshe Shulman

OUR CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE!

When we speak of Abraham, we picture in our minds a man of incredible faith, and commitment, who would follow the word of G'd, no matter how difficult. It is, therefore, surprising, almost unimaginable, to find Abraham doubting a promise made to him by the Almighty Himself! Yet, that is precisely what the Torah describes.

Four times Abraham is promised that he will have children, even at the age of 99 (see Gen. 12:2, 7, 13:16, and 15:5). And after each time, Abraham demonstrated his total faith in G'd's word: "*VE'HEAMIN BA'HASHEM*", "And he believed the Lord, and it was counted for him for righteousness." (15:6) Yet immediately following, G d tells Abraham his children will inherit the Land of Canaan. All of a sudden, Abraham demonstrates doubt, as he questions: "*BAMOH EIDAH KI IRASHENA*" "By what shall I know that I shall inherit it?" How could a man who had followed G d halfway around the world, maintained his faith despite 25 years of frustration and hardship, accepted the miracle of having a child at the age of 100 years, had faith enough in G d and in His Prophecy to submit himself to circumcision at that same age how could a man of such faith possibly doubt a relatively innocuous statement such as: "Your seed will inherit this land"? And this, when he had already accepted the basic notion that he was yet to have children???

Evidently, Abraham's doubt was not in the Power of G d to fulfil His promise, and provide him with children. His doubt, however, lay in the guarantee in the future that his children would DESERVE the land they were promised! For G d never guaranteed the commitment of those children!!

That is, perhaps, the most difficult question a Jew can ask. What guarantee do we have to our children's commitment to Judaism?

You all know the beautiful Midrash, that describes how G d came to the Jewish People and asked them for a guarantor before giving them the Torah. The first choice Our forefathers, was rejected, for they are no longer here, and cannot be our guarantor today. Our prophets their teachings can be forgotten. The only acceptable guarantor was our children Yes our children are our guarantors. Their commitment, is our guarantee to continuity.

But what is the guarantee to the continuity of their commitment? "How do I know that we will inherit the Land?", asks Abraham. How do we know that our children will stay committed? WE DON'T! There is no sure fire guarantees from heaven. Because there are really only two answers to the question of how to maintain Jewish Continuity. Both are learnt from the life of Abraham.

1) LIVE BY EXAMPLE

Abraham's 13 year old son, Yishmael, was willing to be circumcised, because he saw his father do it, at age 99. Abraham taught, not by preaching, but by being a living example. He taught the notion of thanking G d, by feeding guests, and then refusing to take credit for his kindness. He taught commitment to G d, and to Judaism, by following the Commands of G d, no matter how difficult they may be.

We know that children learn by example. While we bemoan the lack of commitment in our youth, we must ask ourselves, "what level of commitment and Jewish observance did they see in their parents?" Compare our commitment to Judaism, and to Jewish values, with those of our parents, or grandparents? What direction did we take? Did we maintain their level of commitment, or even strengthen it? Or did we neglect those values, let them slide and degenerate, slowly but surely, until it was too late? What examples did we set for our children?

2) EDUCATION

There is another crucial element in the recipe for Jewish commitment. EDUCATION. This too, we learn from Abraham, who was not satisfied to lead by example. He taught people the lessons of faith, 'the souls he had made in Charan'. He sought out visitors, whom he could teach about thanking G d. He actively engaged in moral lessons to all around him, and to his family.

For what commitment can we possibly hope for, if our children don't KNOW what being Jewish is all about? Meaningful Jewish education, which emphasises the centrality of Torah to our identity as Jews, has always been the key to Jewish survival, and our continuity. Torah education, for the Jewish people, is not a luxury. It is a matter of survival! It is our investment in our children's Jewish future.

Our Sages lauded the mitzvah of the study of Torah over and above all other Mitzvot: Talmud Torah keneged kulam, "Torah study matches all other Mitzvot." In Jewish law, the sanctity of a school of Torah education is greater than the Sanctity of even a Synagogue!

There is a beautiful legend in the Midrash that when the Messiah will come, G d will throw two bridges across the ocean, one made of steel, the other of paper. The nations of the world will try to walk across the ocean on the bridge of steel, but it will collapse beneath them. The Jewish people will walk across the bridge of paper, and it will sustain them, and they will safely reach the Promised Land.

This is the truth of history. The nations of the world have put their faith in steel, in might, in cannons, and in bombs. While we have built a bridge of paper, the paper of the wisdom and teachings of our Sages, our literature, philosophy, and exegesis, the pages of the prophets, the Mishna and the Talmud. The foundations of this bridge are the strongest possible: the laws of the Torah, 613 Commandments!

Through a strong meaningful Jewish education, where Judaism is taught and

lived by example, we build the future of Israel. In this way, we have a hope that our children shall indeed be our guarantors for the future of Jewish commitment. For our children are our future.

<http://www.tzemachdavid.org/thepracticaltorah/lechlecha.shtml>
Circa 2000

From THE PRACTICAL TORAH A Collection of Presentations of Halachah Based on the Parshas Hashavua

BY RABBI MICHAEL TAUBES

Parshas Lech Lecha: **Changing One's Name**

No definitive Halacha LeMa'aseh conclusions should be applied to practical situations based on any of these Shiurim.

Towards the end of this Parsha, we are told that Hashem changed Avram's name to Avraham (Bereishis 17:5) and then changed Sorai's name to Soroh (Ibid. Posuk 15). Based upon the juxtaposition of his latter Posuk describing Sorai's name change to the Posuk stating that she will eventually have a child (Ibid. Posuk 16), the Gemara in Rosh HaShanah (16b) derives that changing a person's name is one of the things which can alter a bad decree which may have been passed against that person. Interestingly, the Midrash in Bereishis Rabbah (Parsha 44 Siman 15) derives this fact that changing one's name can nullify a bad decree from the earlier Posuk, describing Avram's name change to Avraham. The Midrash in Koheles Rabbasi (Parsha 5 Siman 4), while stating likewise that the value of Shinui HaShem changing one's name is learned from the Posuk relating to Avraham Avinu, mentions Sorai as well, concluding that a decree had been made that Avram and Sorai would never have child; Avraham and Soroh, however, would indeed have a child.

In explaining the reason why changing one's name can cancel a bad decree, the Maharsha on the above cited Gemara in Rosh HaShanah (Chidushai Aggadot to Rosh HaShanah Ibid. s.v. Arba Devarim) quotes from the Semag (Mitzvos Aseh 17) that when one changes one's name, one declares that he is, in effect, a different person, and not the same person who committed the deeds which generated the unfavorable decree. The Eitz Yosef, in his commentary to the above cited Midrash in Bereishis Rabbah (Ibid. s.v. Af), explains it similarly, saying that person declares that he is now, with his new name, not the same person he was, and, consequently, not the person against whom this bad decree has been passed. The Maharsha (Ibid.) then adds that after one has changed one's name, one should recognize that in actuality, it was not his original name, but his sins that caused Hashem to decree unfavorable things for him, and he should therefore become inspired to do Teshuvah and change his ways, and in that way become a truly different person. The Ran in Rosh HaShanah (3b in Rif s.v. Shinui HaShem) also stresses that changing one's name can annul a bad decree because this act will inspire the person to do Teshuvah. The Rambam thus rules (Hilchos Teshuvah Perek 2 Halacha 4) that part of the process of doing Teshuvah is to change one's name, meaning, to declare that he is now a different person, not the one who committed so many sins See Perek 7 Ibid. Halachos 6, 7).

In the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah Siman 335 Sif 10), the Ramo, based on this idea that Shinui Hashem can cancel an unfavorable decree, writes that there is a practice to give a new name to a sick person when blessing him and davening on his behalf. The Aruch HaShulchan (ibid. Sif 12) writes that this means that he is given a new name in addition to, not as a replacement for, the name he already has. This is the case despite that fact that the Gemara in Berachos (13a) indicates regarding Avraham Avinu that it is improper to refer to him by his original name at all. He then states (Ibid.) that this name change is done when the illness is very severe, although he offers no guidelines as to how to determine that status. The Gesher HaChaim (Chelek 1, Perek 1, Sif 3, Ot 4) likewise writes that many observe this custom to change the name of a dangerously ill person by adding on a new name, and he then adds that the changing of the name is accompanied by the recitation of Tehillim in the presence of a Minyan and various other special Tefillos, including a special Yehi Ratzon recited specifically when giving someone an

additional name, as printed in many Siddurim. As a side point, it is interesting to note that this idea in general of reciting Tehillim in order to be protected from anguish and harm is codified by the Rambam (Hilchos Avodas Kochavim Perek 11 Halacha 12).

As to precisely how to choose the new name to be added, Rabbeinu Yehudah HaChassid implies in the Sefer Chassidim (Siman 244) that it is done by means of a Goral, a kind of lottery, meaning that a Chumash (or a Tanach) is opened up, and the first name that one comes across is the new name given to the sick person. It is noteworthy that the Birkei Yosef, in his commentary to the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah Siman 179 Sif Katan 8), quotes those who say that one can seek "advice" in general by opening up a Chumash or a Tanach and studying the Pesukim which one comes across. The Sefer Ta'amei HaMinhagim (Kuntras Acharon to Siman 217, Inyanei Berachos Ot 7, Amud 105) quotes, however, that if the first name one sees is that of a wicked person, one may not give that name to the sick person, since the Gemara in Yoma (Ibid. 38b, and see Ibid. Tosafos s.v. D'Lo) indicates that one should not use the name of a wicked person. He then quotes from the Chida (Sefer Dvash, Maareches 300 Ot 4) that there are certain other names which should not be used for this purpose, and certain names which should be used. The common practice today is to give the sick person a name which somehow symbolizes life, health, strength, or some other type of Beracha which expresses the hope that the person will recover from his illness.

The Gesher HaChaim (Ibid. Ot 5) further writes that the new name being added should become the person's first name, and his original name(s) now become(s) the middle name(s). He then explains that whether or not the person will continue to be referred to by the new name will depend upon whether he recovers from the illness, and upon the nature of his recovery. If he recovers even a little bit, and is able to get up from this illness and establish himself with his new name for at least thirty days, even if he then gets sick again and dies after these thirty days, since he had established himself after having recovered from his illness for at least thirty days with this new name, that name remains associated with him forever. It is thus written on his tombstone, and is used when a Keil Molei Rachamim is said, when Yizkor is recited, and when Mishanyos are learned in his memory, and so on. If, however, the person does not recover from the illness, meaning that he does not establish himself after having gotten up from the illness for at least thirty days with this new name, then he is referred to and remembered only by his original name, and the new name is ignored.

The Sefer Ta'amei HaMinhagim cited above (Ibid.) quotes from the Shaloh (Kitzur 335, Inyanei Sefer Torah) that whether or not the person recovers following the addition of the new name likewise determines whether this name will be used when the person and his sons are subsequently called to the Torah. In the Shulchan Aruch (Even HaEzer Siman 129 Sif 18), the Ramo rules regarding a Get that if one of the parties had a name added on because of an illness, the new name and any nickname associated with it is to be mentioned first. The Pischei Teshuvah (Ibid. Sif Katan 53, 54) discusses some details of this ruling; the Be'er Heitev (Ibid. Sif Katan 32) explains under what conditions the person's children will have to use the added name if they need a Get, and what should be done with this name if the sick person himself wants to divorce his wife while he's still sick. Interestingly, these Poskim do not mention the thirty day period. It is worth noting that the Sefer Ta'amei HaMinhagim (Ibid.) quotes authorities who stress that one must be very careful about changing someone's name, and that it should not be done lightly, but rather in the presence of a Talmid Chochoh and a Tzaddik who will have the proper Kavanos.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/ravfrand-5758-lechlecha>

From: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** ravfrand@torah.org

Parshas Lech Lecha 1997

Dream the Impossible Dream

Go Out and Count the Stars: Two Interpretations In this week's Parsha, Avraham questions G d: "What can you give me, I am childless?" G d

answers by promising Avraham that he will have children. G d directs Avraham outside and asks him to look up and count the stars, saying "Thus will be your descendants" [Bereshis 15:2 5]. I would like to share two insights on this verse, one from Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and one from the Lubliner Rav, Rabbi Meir Shapiro.

Rav S. R. Hirsch: Look Beyond the Course of Nature Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch says there is significance in the fact that G d told Avraham, the first Jew, to go out and look at the stars. If a person is accustomed only to looking at "our world", at earth, he gets into a mode of thinking that everything is "nature". The sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening. There are laws of physics. Everything is a set pattern that is never broken. This natural order of things is perhaps appropriate for the nations of the world, but it is not appropriate for Klal Yisroel [The Jews]. "You, Avraham, have to go out and look at the stars." Amidst the vast constellations, one has a clearer view of the Hand of G d. One becomes more aware that there is a concept of Hashgocha Protis that there is a G d out there who directs and takes interest in a person's life. "Therefore, maybe Avraham, it appears to you that you are childless. Maybe by looking merely at this earth and this world, you get into the mind set that 'I am childless. I never have had children; I never will have children.' But look up into the HHeaven, into the realm of the stars where that Hand of G d is more apparent. That is your lot Avraham, and the lot of your children. Yours is not a destiny and a future of 'Nature' (teva), it is a 'super natural' (L'ma ala min haTeva) destiny and future." When one looks at history, where are the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Babylonians? Where are all these great powers that ruled the world? There is only one nation that is still around for the last 4,000 years. That is Klal Yisroel. This is 'above the course of nature'. This is what G d wanted Avraham to see by looking at the stars.

To Dream the Impossible Dream, To Count the Impossible Count Rav Meir Shapiro asks, "What would be our reaction if someone told us to go out and count the stars?" Our reaction would be to simply ignore the request. We would say, "I know this is an impossible task. I know it is beyond the realm of possibility. Why even bother?" What did Avraham do? He went out and counted the stars! He attempted to do the impossible. G d responded "This is the way your descendants will be" (Koh Yiheye zarecha). "This attribute that you are showing here now when it looks impossible, when it looks beyond the reach of human beings, nevertheless to try; nevertheless to give it one's best Koh Yiheyeh Zarecha. That is the characteristic of Klal Yisrael. That is what a Jew is going to be like. Even though the task seems Herculean, it seems almost impossible, we still must try." The least we can do is try. And when we try, we sometimes see that amazing things can happen. We think that we don't have such strengths and such abilities to withstand that which life deals us. We think it is beyond our capability. But we try and we are gifted and granted with 'kochos' 'strengths' that we never dreamt we possessed. That is the Blessing of "Thus shall be your descendants." Klal Yisroel has the attribute of looking at something which seems impossible, but nevertheless trying, never giving up... and being rewarded with powers that they never thought they had.

A blind Jew once came in to Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer. The Jew put down, in front of Rav Isser Zalman, two volumes of 'chidushei Torah' 'novel insights into Torah' that he had written before he became blind. The Jew told Rav Isser Zalman to look at a certain place in the book and said, "This piece was my last chiddush and then I went blind." Rav Isser Zalman asked the Jew what he meant by saying that it was his 'last chiddush'. The blind man explained that when he wrote that particular insight he was already an older man. He had worked for years on these volumes. When reached that piece he said to himself, "I've had enough. It is difficult to come up with new Torah insights. I am calling it quits. >From now on I will learn, but not with the same intensity and thoroughness I just don't have the strength anymore." The man told Rav Isser Zalman that immediately after that decision, he became blind. The man went to the doctors and specialists of the day, seeking a cure. They examined him and told him, "With the way your eyes are now, you should have been blind 10

years ago. We can't understand why you weren't blind, long ago." But we can. Because as long as that Jew felt compelled to write those 'chidushei Torah', that he dipped down to reach for strength that he never knew he possessed, he received super natural strengths. He saw things with eyes that perhaps a normal human being could not see out of because he tried, because he reached, because he sought the impossible. When he stopped and said 'enough', he lost those strengths.

It is that quality of 'Thus will be your children' that Avraham exhibited by trying to count the stars. That is the quality of Klal Yisroel.

<https://www.aish.com/48956356.html>

What's In A Name?

May 13, 2000

by Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn

I had already performed the bris on the eight day old infant; the prayers entering the child into the Covenant of Abraham had been recited and now the long anticipated moment had arrived the name of the new infant was about to be announced. The assembled guests eagerly anticipated the exciting news. Traditionally, a baby boy's Hebrew name is not revealed to anyone before the bris other than those involved in choosing it. And likewise, a baby girl's Hebrew name is not revealed until she is named in synagogue during the reading of the Torah. Would the baby boy at this particular bris be named for a late uncle? For a beloved cousin who recently passed away? Or perhaps for a distinguished rabbi? Maybe he would be given a name his parents chose merely because they liked it.

Naming a child is one of the most important decisions new parents make. The Talmud (Berachos 7b) teaches that a Hebrew name has an influence on its bearer. Hence, it is extremely important to name your children after individuals with positive character traits who have led fortunate lives and have helped bring goodness to the world.

The legendary Kabbalist, the Arizal, writes that the nature and behavior of a person, whether good or bad, can be discovered by analyzing his or her name. A child named Yehudah could possibly be destined for leadership, for Yehudah, the fourth son of Jacob, symbolized monarchy and indeed, most Jewish kings descended from the tribe of Yehudah. It is said that parents are actually blessed with prophesy when naming their newborn babies so that they will choose names which aptly describe their children's personas and their destinies in life.

According to the Arizal, even the numerical value of the Hebrew letters in one's name can be indicative of an individual's character. For example, the numerical value, or gematria, of the name Elisheva is equivalent to the numerical value of the Hebrew words "yemei simcha", meaning days of happiness, perhaps portending a joyous life for a baby girl named Elisheva.

It is precisely because the fortunes and misfortunes of mankind are concealed in the secrets of the letters, vowels and meanings of Hebrew names that a seriously ill person is given an additional name like Chaim, meaning life, or Rafael, meaning G-d heals, in order to influence his destiny. We hope and pray that the new name will herald a new mazal, or fortune, for the stricken individual.

One of the founders of Chassidism in Galicia, Poland, Rabbi Elimelech of Lyzhansk, writes in his classic work on Torah, Noam Elimelech, (Bamidbar), that there is a profound connection between the soul of an infant and the soul of the person for whom he or she is named. When a child is named after the deceased, the latter's soul is elevated to a higher realm in Heaven and a spiritual affinity is created between the soul of the departed and the soul of the newborn child. That deep spiritual bond between these two souls can have a profound impact on the child.

The Hebrew word for soul neshama is spelled with the four Hebrew letters nun, shin, mem and hei. Remarkably, the Hebrew word for name, shem spelled shin, mem is contained within the word neshama, indicating yet again the strong connection between one's name and one's soul, or essence.

Back at the bris, the young father was now huddled next to his own

father the baby's grandfather who was being honored with the recitation of the naming prayer. Holding a goblet filled with wine, the grandfather intoned, "Our G-d and G-d of our forefathers, preserve this child for his father and mother, and may his name be called in Israel." The grandfather waited for his son to whisper the name in his ear so that he could proudly announce it.

"Yoel" whispered the father. The grandfather gasped as tears suddenly welled in his eyes. His voice choked as his lips quivered with emotion. His new grandson was being named for his own father the baby's great grandfather. Tears also welled in the eyes of all the guests who remembered Yoel Pfeiffer.

In the late 1930s, he was forced to escape from Germany the night after he got married. He made it to England but upon arrival there he was imprisoned as a suspected spy. He remained on British soil throughout the war until he was able at last to immigrate to Canada where he was reunited with his wife.

The late Yoel Pfeiffer began his life anew in Montreal. With almost nothing but perseverance, he built a family, a business and a legacy of charitable deeds. At the festive meal following the bris, the young father recalled the fondness he had for his grandfather and explained how he and his wife wished to honor him and how they hoped to confer his strength of character to their new son, Yoel Pfeiffer.

As a Mohel, one trained to perform Jewish ritual circumcision, I am often involved in helping families choose appropriate Hebrew names for their children. My advice is based on three principles: a) Use the exact Hebrew name of the person you wish to honor or choose a name that at least contains several of the same letters in this individual's Hebrew name; b) be sure your child's name contains only positive connotations, and c) select a name your child will be proud of. Remember, your child's name is his eternal identity.

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<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/974821/rabbi-moshe-taragin/thoughts-for-lech-lecha-judaism-is-a-different-type-of-religion/>
October 29, 2020 5781

Parshat Lech Lecha Moshe Taragin Are All Religions Valuable?

For approximately two thousand years, humanity was lost in theological confusion and moral mayhem. Finally, one great man uncovered the Creator of the universe and journeyed to the supernatural land of Divine presence. Avraham's selection dramatically revolutionizes the history of religion. The man chosen to revamp religious history was a legendary personality who had single handedly discovered G-d, while displaying fearless courage is defending his beliefs. In the past, humankind had persistently assumed that our vast and teeming world of boundless diversity was fashioned by multiple creators. Avraham debunked this folly and discerned a One G-d who he introduced to his generation. This discovery was remarkable, given that Avraham's own father was a pagan notable who ultimately ratted out his own 'heretic' son, condemning Avraham to death by fire. Miraculously, through Divine intervention, Avraham survived this blazing inferno. Avraham was a revolutionary philosopher and defiant hero- in short- the perfect candidate to launch the history of G-d's chosen people. Yet, surprisingly, the details of Avraham's past are repressed. The Torah introduces Avraham without providing the important background details which warranted his selection. Shouldn't this great man be introduced along with his heroic credentials? Why is this information confidential? Nachmanides asserts that Avraham's past is suppressed to avoid expounding upon contemporary pagan religions. Detailing Avraham's religious discovery would have mandated equal "air time" for the parallel religions which he discarded. Omitting the details of Avraham's background enables the Torah to sidestep any mention of these erroneous religious systems and to present the rise of Avraham in an untainted fashion.

Avraham without juxtaposing other religions, the Torah stresses the contrast between Judaism and other religions. Introducing Judaism alongside contemporary religions might have implied "equivalency". Presenting the evolution of Judaism in a "vacuum" emphasizes the unique and singular nature of Judaism.

The Modern Era of enlightenment and religious tolerance demands a nuanced and complex view of other religions. Without question, we value all varieties of religious experience which assist Man in his search for the Other. Religion highlights the dependency of Man upon a higher being – a recognition which is inherently valuable. Additionally, religion conditions people to cardinal virtues such as morality, family, social consciousness, and character improvement. One of the great triumphs of the past century was the convincing defeat of Communism- a system which sought to craft a society absent of religion. A religious world of paganism – as corrupt and barbaric as it may be – is certainly preferable to a world of atheism. Likewise, the modern state of world religion dominated by monotheistic systems, is far preferable to the idolatrous world of our ancestors.

We don't just value alternate religious lifestyles, but also acknowledge important similarities between our own religious experience and the experiences of what many people refer to as our "co-religionists". We form collaborative alliances with members of various religions, jointly struggling to uphold common religious values in a rapidly secularizing world. We are legitimately inspired by lives devoted to religious values, and we are even enriched by studying the religious thoughts of sincerely religious writers from other religions. Religious people share much in common and the advent of religious tolerance has allowed us to bridge across religious communities. However, the age of religious enlightenment can also blur differences between Judaism and other religions or create a false sense of equivalence. Judaism is fundamentally different from other religions – both in content as well as in its transmission. All religions were conceived by human intellect and human imagination. Human constructs can establish language for religious experience and approximations of G-d, but they are utterly incapable of conceiving of the essence of G-d. Avraham also studied and also discovered G-d through human analysis and inquiry. According to one version he assessed all religions until he discovered his Creator at the age of forty eight. However, his "discovery" would have been partial and inaccurate had G-d not answered Avraham's with direct revelation coupled with direct religious instructions. This experience of direct Divine revelation launched the unique religious history of the Jews – the nation of supernatural revelation. The process begun in Genesis climaxed at Har Sinai with "mass revelation". No religion has ever staked this audacious claim of mass revelation and none ever will. The assertion that three and half million people directly encountered the unmediated voice of G-d is the sole province of Judaism. Despite the numerous parallels with other religions, Judaism is fundamentally distinct, and for this reason the contemporary religions of Avraham's era are textually "ignored", even at the cost of withholding Avraham's past heroics. To avoid any sense of equivalency, the launch of Judaism is spotlighted in "a vacuum" without mentioning other religions and without implying any comparison.

We are grateful that the modern era of religious tolerance has rescued Jews from centuries of religious persecution. It is both enriching and reinforcing to acknowledge the common interests and experiences we share with members of other religions. Despite these similarities, we mustn't assume equivalence between our own customs and mores and those of other religions. Avraham was chosen for direct revelation and hundreds of years later G-d directly spoke to his children. This process has only occurred once in history and is fundamentally different from the manner by which other religions were formed.

AFTERWORD

The venerable 19th century leader Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk would consistently walk by the estate of a non-Jewish nobleman well known for his moral and pious lifestyle. He was asked about this strange decision- to constantly stroll alongside the home of a non-Jew. He explained that when

reciting the blessing of "shelo asani goy" – thanking G-d for selecting us as Jews, he wasn't grateful to be selected from drunk or vile Gentiles. Instead, he wanted to celebrate his selection from ideal or outstanding Gentiles whose lives reflected honorable values. His evaluation of his Jewishness wasn't based on the degradation of others but rather the celebration of his unique calling. Our unique Jewish identity isn't built on dismissing the value of non-Jewish lives. However, our "pluralism" in validating different lifestyles cannot erode the pride of our unique Jewish religious experience.

Shema Yisrael Torah Network **Peninim on the Torah**

- Parshas Lech Lecha

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

א פרשת לך לך; ויטע לוט מקדם

ויטע לוט מקדם ... ויטע לוט מקדם

So Lot raised his eyes and saw the entire plain of Jordan... and Lot journeyed from the east. (13:10,11) Rashi (quoting the Midrash) explains that Lot was not simply distancing himself from Avraham Avinu in a geographical sense, but was actually distancing himself m'Kadmono shel Olam, the Ancient One of the world (kedem can also be understood as "before" i.e., ancient one), Hashem Yisborach. Lot separated himself from Avraham and everything he represented, saying, "I want neither Avraham nor his G-d." Chazal attribute this declaration to Lot. It is a strong statement, especially since Lot did not have a history of harboring any negativity towards his uncle, Avraham, or Avraham's G-d, Hashem. On the contrary, we see Lot prepared to relinquish his life to protect his guests. He baked matzos in honor of Pesach (as he had seen Avraham do in the past). Nonetheless, as explained by the Alter, zl, m'Kelm, Chazal deduced that since Lot had been prepared to uproot himself from the sanctity of Avraham's home, to relocate to Sodom, a city filled with inhabitants who were the essence of evil, who mistreated anyone who had the misfortune to visit their community, it was evident that Lot's mitzvah observance was not indicative of his true spiritual essence. He was an apikores, heretic, who denied Hashem. Anyone who truly believed in Hashem could not sanction such a move. Mitzvah observance is not the barometer of true commitment. It is one's hashkafos, philosophic perspective, his outlook on life and living, that tells us who he is and in what he believes. People might perform mitzvos out of habit; thus their actions have no impact on their hashkafah. This is noticeable when we see mitzvah observant Jews maintain abiding relationships with individuals who are morally, ethically and spiritually flawed. They support them and even join in their Torah-negative endeavors. At the end of the day, what did Lot actually benefit from his radical move to Sodom? Nothing? Less than nothing. Had he remained with Avraham, he would have been spiritually and materially wealthy. He left Sodom with nothing but his life. True, he had initially been wealthy until Hashem declared the decree to destroy Sodom. Wealth that does not last (which is the case with all physical/material bounty) is not something for which one should sacrifice himself. It is only the benefits of the spirit which endure and leave a lasting legacy to be imparted to future generations. Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, supports this idea with the reward Avraham received for refusing to accept financial remuneration from the King of Sodom. "[I refuse to accept anything from you], so much as a thread to a shoe strap; I shall not take anything of yours! So you shall not say, "It is I who made Avram rich"" (14:23). As a result of declining the two strings: thread, shoe strap, Avraham's descendants merited the mitzvah of techeiles (Tzitzis) and Tefillin, both "cords" which engender enduring spiritual reward. All this was because Avraham refused to allow a pagan to say that he supported Avraham. Avraham could not permit the chillul Hashem, desecration of Hashem's Name, which such a statement engendered. Money meant nothing to Avraham if its source was murky. Lot did not have such inhibitions. He paid dearly for his error. This is an oft-repeated error, whereby we exchange a budding spiritual fortune for its material counterpart. This is tantamount to swapping our future for the present, forgetting that a present that does not have concrete hope for the future is not much of a present. Rav Neiman

relates that during World War I, the Mashgiach of Lomza, Horav Moshe Rozenstein, zl, told him that the Menahel of Lomza, Horav Eliezer Shulovitz, zl, hired him as Mashgiach. At the time, he determined how much would be needed to support the Mashgiach and his family. Rav Rozenstein was considering requesting a higher salary, since he was well aware that his daughters would soon be of marriageable age, and they would require a dowry. He remarked that had he refused the money, Rav Shulovitz would have acquiesced. He decided that he would not request a raise in salary, trusting that Hashem would reward him for his devotion to his students. When the war broke out, the banks went under because the Russian currency no longer had any value. Rav Rozenstein said to Rav Neiman, “Had I asked for the raise, I would have taken the money and deposited it in the bank. I would now have nothing. Instead, I did not take the money and instead I left it up to Hashem to see to my dowry. My daughters married exceptional bnei Torah. (Sadly, the entire family was murdered by the Nazis.) Horav Mordechai Shmukler, zl, was one of the premier students of Yeshivas Radin under the direction of the saintly Chafetz Chaim. When he married, he received from his father-in-law a large sum of money to invest in business. Being a close student of the Chafetz Chaim, he consulted with his Rebbe concerning his future plans. The holy Chafetz Chaim, zl, told him, “When a ben Torah marries and makes plans to abandon Torah life for a life in the field of commerce, if he is truly fortunate, he will lose all of his money immediately. Then, he still has time to return to the yeshivah to learn and become a rav or rosh yeshivah. If he does not have mazel, good fortune, it will be an extended period before he loses his fortune. By then, he will have forgotten his learning and be left bereft of both: his money and his learning.” The Chafetz Chaim blessed him that his material assets not be around long enough for him to forget his learning. The brachah was realized with Rav Mordechai’s first investment. As a result, he became a distinguished rosh yeshivah who inspired many students with his erudition and analytical ability.

ואנשי סדם רעים והטאים לל' מאד

Now, the people of Sodom were wicked and sinful toward Hashem. (13:13) Every once in a while, I like to veer from the recurrent themes of our commentary and digress with an exposition that has an esoteric Chassidic slant to it, especially if it presents the message of the pasuk in a totally new and positive light. The seudas Melaveh Malkah, meal bidding farewell to the Shabbos Queen, holds great significance in Jewish tradition. While it is true that it seems to have taken on a greater celebratory life in Chassidic circles, it does not mean that it has any less significance in other Orthodox circles. After spending an entire day immersed in the unique – almost mystical – retreat from the material and mundane, our added Shabbos soul, the neshamah yeseirah, takes its leave, and we return to our daily lives. Many sit down to a meal on Motzoei Shabbos, sing zemiros, religious songs, themed concerning Dovid Hamelech/Moshiach and Eliyahu HaNavi, and recite stories of tzaddikim, righteous persons. A further tradition is that we each have a small, indestructible bone in the body called the luz. It sits at the base of the skull, where the knot of the Tefillin rests. It is from this bone that Hashem will reconstruct the entire body when the time for Techiyas Ha'Meisim, Resurrection of the Dead, arrives. The only food that nourishes the luz bone is that which is eaten during the Melaveh Malkah seudah, meal. In the sefer Divrei Chonoh, Horav Chonoh, zl, m'Koloshitz homiletically renders the pasuk, V'anshei Sodom raim v'chataim l'Hashem, with the word Sodom serving as an abbreviation for samech – seudassa; daled – d'David; mem – Malka, - the meal of David Hamelech, namely the Melaveh Malkah meal. The author continues by interpreting ra'im, as re'im – friends, and chata'im, as related to v'cheetai es ha'bayis, “He shall cleanse the house” (Vayikra 14:52), in which ra and chet are interpreted as friend and cleanse, respectively. The pasuk thus implies that when we eat the Melaveh Malkah meal together with friends, it is a purifying and uplifting experience, facilitating our spiritual ascendance. The Ohr Pnei Moshe, Horav Moshe, zl, m'Pshevorsk, was a close associate of Horav Elimelech, zl, m'Lishensk and Horav Zushe, zl, m'Annepole and other Chassidic giants (1720-1806). He

was known to be an unusual sofer, scribe. It is known that the Alshich HaKadosh appeared to him often to teach him Torah. Apparently, prior to being megaleh, revealing himself as a Rebbe, the Pshevorsker was a manager in a whiskey factory. (This story was related by Horav Shlomo Halberstam, zl, first Bobover Rebbe.) When the Rebbe applied for the position, the owner of the factory (himself a deeply-observant Jew) asked if he knew the secret of producing high-quality whiskey. The Rebbe said not to worry, he would produce high grade-whiskey which would be highly sought after. Obviously, having no experience whatsoever in the whiskey-making field, this assurance was a stretch, but, true to his word, the reputation of the whiskey which the factory produced spread far and wide, making the owner a wealthy man. The relationship between the owner and his manager was very amicable. Out of a sense of appreciation for the success engendered by his manager, the owner invited him to share in Melaveh Malkah, to which the manager agreed.

One Motzoei Shabbos, the manager did not come by. After a while, the owner became concerned and went to Rav Moshe's home to find out if anything was wrong. When he came to the house, he noticed a brilliant light shining from the window (This is before light bulbs. A candle gives off just so much light. Apparently, an unusual illumination emanated from the house.) The owner walked over to the window to discover Rav Moshe in deep conversation with an elderly man. Their discussion was Torah-related and involved the pasuk in Tehillim 89:21, Matzasi David Avdi, b'shemen Kodshi Meshaktiv, “I have found David, My servant, with My holy oil I have anointed him.” The Midrash (Rabbah, Lech Lecha 41) asks: “Where did I find him? In Sodom.” Clearly, this Midrash appears enigmatic. The elderly man (who was evidently a holy person – if he was, in fact, a person) explained that Sodom is a notrakon, acronym, for seudassa d'David Malkah, which alludes that the Melaveh Malkah meal is a time to connect with the attributes of David Hamelech. Afterwards, the elderly man informed Rav Moshe that the time had come to reveal himself as a Rebbe.

The owner of the whiskey factory now realized that Rav Moshe was no simple Jew who knew how to prepare a good whiskey. He was a spiritually-elevated, holy Jew. The very next morning, the owner stood by Rav Moshe's door, bearing a kvittel, written petition, with his family names and a pidyon, redemption money, both of which are given to a Chassidic Rebbe upon petitioning his blessing. He said, “I want to be the first person to give the “Rebbe” a kvittel.

Va'ani Tefillah

ועל כולם יתברך ויתרום שמך – V'Al kulam Yisborach v'Yisromam Shimcha. For all these, may Your Name be blessed and exalted. It appears that in addition to the various expressions of gratitude that preceded this prayer, we add an all-inclusive praise to Hashem for everything that He does for us. What is this prayer adding to what was expressed earlier? Horav Avraham Chaim Feuer (Shemoneh Esrai) relates a well-known incident that occurred concerning Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, during an outreach visit to Paris. He entered an elegant restaurant, where he was to meet a group of “upper crust” Jews who frequented this establishment. Not wanting to take up a table for no reason, he ordered a glass of water. He was given a bill for forty francs, which was an outlandish price for a glass of water. When he expressed his surprise, the waiter explained, “You are not just paying for the water. You are paying for the ambience that surrounds you while you drink the water.” He was served on crystal; he sat on a stuffed leather couch, at a mahogany table; carpeting covered the floor; and chandeliers lit the room. No wonder he was charged a premium price. Likewise, Rav Yisrael said, “We make a brachah, She'hakol neheyeiv Bidevaro, “Through Whose word everything came to be.” When we recite this blessing before drinking a glass of water, we are also thanking Hashem for the magnificent surroundings of this extraordinary world in which we live. This is the meaning of the prayer, V'al kulam: Thank You Hashem for everything! We appreciate all that You do for others, and we acknowledge not only the actual gift, but the manner and the environment through which we enjoy it.

לזכר נשמת חנה בת חיים יששכר דוב ע"ה

נפטרה י"א חשוון

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from: torahweb@torahweb.org to: weeklydt@torahweb.org
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Rabbi Mayer Twersky
Do Not Be Exceedingly Righteous [1]

I
For the past months within several of our communities we have been confronted by a strange, dissonant reality.

On the one hand, we are scrupulously observant, and yet, on the other hand, shockingly contemptuous of the cardinal מצוה to safeguard life (ונשמרתם מאד (לנפשותיכם). As multifariously evidenced both on a collective, communal level as well as a personal, individual level, we are extraordinarily kind and compassionate. And yet, we have been acting with extreme cruelty in transmitting a potentially lethal virus to each other with predictably catastrophic consequences. We are committed to protecting the honor of Heaven (כבוד שמים) and yet, time and time again, our contempt for public health measures has greatly profaned the honor of Heaven (חלול השם).

Who would have thought that such a contradiction fraught scenario could possibly exist? And yet, indisputably, this scenario prevails in several of our communities.

II
Let us present and reflect upon one cause (inter alia) of this dissonant reality. (Human behavior, like humans themselves, is complex, and we ought to steer clear of reductionism.) "Human nature is such... that a person emulates his fellow citizens" (Rambam, Hilchos De'os 6:1). "It is prohibited to adopt gentile practices or emulate their ways... Rather a Jew should stand apart from them, distinguished in his dress and conduct, just as he stands apart in his knowledge and character, as the Torah states, 'I have set you apart from the nations'" (ibid. Hilchos Avoda Zara 11:1).

Throughout the millennia we have made a consistent, concerted effort to overcome susceptibility to negative influences, thereby retaining our singular identity and remaining a distinct, unique people. In recent decades, however, in several of our communities we have adopted a greatly exaggerated stance. A Weltanschauung has emerged and crystalized which indiscriminately rejects and contemptuously dismisses the outside world in toto. Our motivation is noble, but our actions are decidedly ignoble. This extreme Weltanschauung with its intellectual xenophobia embellishes the Torah's imperative of separateness. In embellishing, we diminish, undermine, and imperil (כל המוסיף גורע).

Contempt and hatred inevitably result in extreme, anomalous behavior (שנאה (מקלקלת את השורה; Rashi, Bamidbar 22:21, Sanhedrin 105b). The painful, sacrilegious, dissonant reality we have experienced these past months results from entrenched, indiscriminate contempt and blind, self-destructive hatred. As previously discussed, there is vital need for discriminating, targeted rejection of outside intellectual and cultural currents. Undoubtedly, most of contemporary society's intellectual and cultural output is anathema and, as such, must be blocked and rejected. Additionally, there is room for legitimate difference of opinion regarding a small percentage of society's intellectual output. But there is equally vital, halachic need to "accept truth from whomever speaks it" (Rambam, introduction to Eight Chapters). Rejection of societal culture must be discriminating because Halachah is discriminating; while it unequivocally rejects that which is antithetical, it unabashedly welcomes, even seeks, certain elements of חכמה even when they emanate from the outside world. Case in point: Halachah recognizes, respects and relies upon medical knowledge and opinion from the outside world. (See Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 618:1.)

And yet, in clear, indefensible violation of Halachah, we have (in several of our communities) throughout the pandemic ignored and rejected medical science, its warnings and protocols. In so doing we have acted against our

own halachic principles; cruelly inflicted suffering and death upon ourselves; and betrayed our most sacred trust of כבוד שמים.

This profoundly anomalous, self-contradictory, self-destructive behavior has resulted from the toxic hatred and exaggerated, indiscriminate contempt for the outside world.

An even more pronounced form of the self-contradiction has been rejecting medical knowledge even when shared by Torah observant medical health professionals who otherwise are highly respected within our communities. All this rejection and negativity despite the fact that we ourselves, in other medical contexts, seek the best medical treatment available. Apparently, when the initiative is ours, we embrace medical knowledge from the outside world. But when we perceive the initiative as coming from the outside, our visceral contempt self-destructively prevails.

Plagued by a mindset of contempt and suspicion, we also become especially susceptible to misinformation, deception and falsehood cynically propagated to contradict and erode confidence in medical knowledge and guidelines. Our association with such primitivity and perversion adds yet another dimension to the terrible הלול השם. In this context we are unavoidably reminded of the measles outbreak within small segments of some of our communities due to lack of vaccination.

III
Currently, within our aforementioned communities, there are calls for compliance with public health protocols and guidelines. And yet the distortion of תורה and הלול השם continue unabated. The reason being, that we do not attribute the need for compliance with the Torah's zealous, proactive, preventive protection of life. Instead, we attribute the need to comply with our desire to have Yeshivos re-open or remain open. We thus outrageously insinuate that ours is a callous religion r"l exclusively devoted to study, cruelly and irresponsibly impervious to loss of life. Other voices within our communities cite the second wave as a reason for compliance, as though Halachah only reacts to loss of life ex post facto. Our stubborn, ongoing distortion of תורה is staggering and frightening.

How long will we distort תורה? And how long will we continue to be מחלל שם שמים?

IV
The ongoing distortion of תורה and הלול השם demand from us wide-ranging, incisive introspection. The following thought, briefly presented, constitutes, at best, a partial beginning of this crucial process.

The pandemic has not created deficiencies or deficits within our Weltanschauung. It has "only" highlighted pre-existing flaws and exposed their depth. (Thus, for example, we ought to recognize that the imbalance and disproportionality of our approach express themselves in other, non-medical, fundamental forms and contexts.) Accordingly, the end of the pandemic, for which we pray, will not cure these (or other) core religious-spiritual ills.

A religious-philosophical system which distorts תורה and causes continuous הלול השם is fundamentally flawed; it can neither guide us in our lives nor provide an educational framework for our children. Fundamental change and correction are required as part of תשובה. The task is most formidable, but not too formidable given the devotion and dedication which characterize our communities.

"Let us search our ways, and investigate; and return to Hashem" (Eicha 3:40).

[1] Koheles 7:16. An adapted, English version of אלהי צדיק הרבה published 7 Cheshvan 5781/25 October 2020.

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Rabbi Mordechai Willig
A Great Nation

I

"And I will make you a great nation' (Bereishis 12:2). Because the journey diminishes reproduction, Avraham needed a blessing to have many descendants" (Rashi). The Midrash Tanchuma explains differently, as follows: when did Hashem make Avraham into a great nation? When Am Yisrael accepted the Torah, as Moshe declared (Devarim 4:8), "And which is a great nation that has just statutes and laws, as the entire Torah that I place before you today?" (Tanchuma Lech Lecha 3).

Rashi understands a great nation quantitatively. Despite the arduous journey, which inhibits procreation, you will father a large nation. By contrast, the Tanchuma interprets a great nation qualitatively and links this greatness to the acceptance of the laws of the Torah.

In fact, the phrase "great nation" (goy gadol) is found twice more in Devarim (4:6-7), "When the nations of the world hear the Torah laws, they will comment, when seeing you observe the laws, 'This great nation is wise and understanding.' For which is a great nation that has a G-d Who is close to it, as HaShem whenever we call to Him?"

The Ba'al HaTurim writes that the blessing "I will make you a nation (goy)" is the greatest (gadol) of the seven blessings found in 12:2 and 12:3. This national experience includes slavery and emancipation. The mere fact that Avraham's progeny will emerge as a national unit that survives forever, as a national unit in good times and bad, is "gadol," the greatest bracha.

II

The series of the aforementioned three pesukim which contain the phrase "great nation" begins (4:6), "This is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations." The Gemara (Shabbos 75a) asks: What is the wisdom and understanding that is visible to the eyes of the nations? This is the calculation of the "tekufos umazalos." These astronomical and astrological phenomena, as interpreted by wise Jewish scholars, are later confirmed when their meteorological predictions come true (Rashi).

It is this wisdom which is called bina, understanding (Divrei Hayamim I 12:33, see Rashi Devarim 33:18) that the nations, which do not possess Torah wisdom, can ascertain (Maharsha).

This, in turn, leads to their statement that our great nation is wise and because we observe all of the laws of the Torah.

In earlier generations, Rabbinic scholars were recognized for their scientific and medical knowledge, which led to a great appreciation of Torah by their non-Jewish contemporaries. Today, Jewish scientists and doctors continue to enhance our great nation's international reputation.

III

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the Orthodox Jewish community disproportionately. All of the blessings of "I will make you a great nation" have been affected. The sheer number of fatalities, r"l, has quantitatively reduced our great nation. Of course, each loss is a terrible tragedy for the deceased and the close family and friends. But the cumulative losses in the Orthodox community have been devastating.

Our reputation as a wise and understanding nation has been tarnished. Despite staggering numbers of mortality and morbidity, and notwithstanding repeated warnings and predictions that have come true, appropriate precautions are often ignored. Nearly all physicians, including numerous Orthodox doctors, agree that masks and social distance reduce risk of transmission. In many if not most circumstances, lack of precaution adds danger. It is not only unscientific, it is against the halachic requirement to avoid danger whenever possible. The dozens of recent Covid-19 funerals across the spectrum of Orthodoxy, in the US and Eretz Yisrael, should lead to universal compliance. The failure to wear masks and to distance is a perplexing case of cognitive dissonance, unbecoming a wise and understanding nation.

IV

Avraham's greatest blessing was the creation of an eternal national unit known as Am Yisrael. Based on halacha and mesora, Jews congregate in tefila and Torah, in simcha and aivel. However, the basis of these laudable practices is concern for a fellow Jew. We often go to extraordinary lengths to help and join with others. Today this same mandate demands that we reduce

these communal activities to help us stay safe. As a single national unit, we may not practice extreme individualism which results in the spread COVID. Similarly, young Jews many not unnecessarily risk getting COVID-19 based on relatively mild outcomes for youngsters. As a single national unit, the welfare of older Jews, who can be infected by younger ones with disastrous consequences, cannot be ignored. Shuls, schools, wedding and funerals are all potential spreaders and must proceed with caution. Teaching youngsters to engage in lies or subterfuge to circumvent local laws is terrible chinuch. Dishonesty leads some to leave Torah observance (See the book "Off the Derech" by Faranak Margolese), and causes a chilul Hashem. It could lead to anti-Semitism by those claiming that Orthodox Jews spread disease.

V

Thankfully, many are now taking the precautions advocated by many gedolei rabbanim, doctors and governmental authorities. This will lead to the fulfillment of Hashem's promise to make us a goy gadol, a great nation. Our numbers will increase as we limit death by COVID-19. Our reputation as a wise and understanding nation, which the Torah attributes to scientific knowledge as well as halachic observance, both of which are reflected by adhering to sound medical advice, will be restored. And the greatest blessing is realized when, as a single national unit, we do whatever is necessary and appropriate to save lives, including staying home.

As members of this great nation, let us all call to HaShem Who is close to us. May Hashem answer our prayers, bring a refua shelaima to the sick, protect the healthy, end the pandemic speedily and fulfill the blessings He gave Avraham Avinu so many years ago.

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More divrei Torah on Parshas Lech Lecha

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